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CHAPTER III

Ketman

● 155 OFFICIALLY, contradictions do not exist in the minds of the citizens in the people's democracies. Nobody dares to reveal them publicly. And yet the question of how to deal with them is posed in real life. More than others, the members of the intellectual elite are aware of this problem. They solve it by becoming actors.

It is hard to define the type of relationship that prevails between people in the East otherwise than as acting, with the exception that one does not perform on a theater stage but in the street, office, factory, meeting hall, or even the room one lives in. Such acting is a highly developed craft that places a premium upon mental alertness. Before it leaves the lips, every word must be evaluated as to its consequences. A smile that appears at the wrong moment, a glance that is not all it should be can occasion dangerous suspicions and accusations. Even one's gestures, tone of voice, or preference for certain kinds of neckties are interpreted as signs of one's political tendencies.

A visitor from the Imperium is shocked on coming to the West. In his contacts with others, beginning with porters or taxi drivers, he encounters no resistance. The people he meets are completely relaxed. They lack that internal concentration which betrays itself in a lowered head

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or in restlessly moving eyes. They say whatever words come to their tongues; they laugh aloud. Is it possible that human relations can be so direct?

Acting in daily life differs from acting in the theater in that everyone plays to everyone else, and everyone is fully aware that this is so. The fact that a man acts is not to his prejudice, is no proof of unorthodoxy. But he must act well, for his ability to enter into his role skillfully proves that he has built his characterization upon an adequate foundation. If he makes a passionate speech against the West, he demonstrates that he has at least 10 per cent of the hatred he so loudly proclaims. If he condemns Western culture lukewarmly, then he must be attached to it in reality. Of course, all human behavior contains a significant amount of acting. A man reacts to his environment and is molded by it even in his gestures. Nevertheless, what we find in the people's democracies is a conscious mass play rather than automatic imitation. Conscious acting, if one practices it long enough, develops those traits which one uses most in one's role, just as a man who became a runner because he had good legs develops his legs even more in training. After long acquaintance with his role, a man grows into it so closely that he can no longer differentiate his true self from the self he simulates, so that even the most intimate of individuals speak to each other in Party slogans. To identify one's self with the role one is obliged to play brings relief and permits a relaxation of one's vigilance. Proper reflexes at the proper moment become truly automatic.

This happens in literature as well. A poet writing a piece of propaganda does not confine himself to a purely rationalistic approach. Imbued with the thought that poetry ideally should be suited to recitation in chorus at a meeting, he begins by tuning himself to an appropriate

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modern in the West. But how can one still the thought 626
that aesthetic experiences arise out of something organic, 517
and that the union of color and harmony with fear is as difficult to imagine as brilliant plumage on birds living in the northern tundras?

Professional Ketman[1] is reasoned thus: since I find my- 626
self in circumstances over which I have no control, and 155 ●
since I have but one life and that is fleeting, I should strive to do my best. I am like a crustacean attached to a crag on the bottom of the sea. Over me storms rage and huge ships sail; but my entire effort is concentrated upon clinging to the rock, for otherwise I will be carried off by the waters and perish, leaving no trace behind. If I am a scientist I attend congresses at which I deliver reports strictly adhering to the Party line. But in the laboratory I pursue my research according to scientific methods, and in that alone lies the aim of life. If my work is successful, it matters little how it will be presented and toward whose glory. Discoveries made in the name of a disinterested search for truth are lasting, whereas the shrieks of politicians pass. I must do all they demand, they may use my name as they wish, as long as I have access to a laboratory and money for the purchase of scientific instruments.

If I am a writer, I take pride in my literary achievements. Here, for example, is my treatise on Swift, a Marxist analysis. This type of analysis, which is not synonymous with the Method or the New Faith, makes possible a keen penetration into historical events. Marx had a genius for observation. In following him one is secure against attack, for he is, after all, the prophet; and one can proclaim one's belief in the Method and the New Faith in a preface fulfilling much the same function as dedications to kings or tsars in times past. Here is my translation of a sixteenth-century poem, or my novel

[1] [For a definition of "Ketman", see cat. 116, pp. 57-60 - Analyst]

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626 whose scene is laid in the distant past. Aren't they of per-
● 153 manent value? Here are my translations from Russian. They are viewed with approbation and have brought me a large sum of money, but certainly Pushkin is a great poet, and his worth is not altered by the fact that today his poems serve Him as a means of propaganda. Obviously I must pay for the right to practice my profession with a certain number of articles and odes in the way of tribute. Still one's life on earth is not judged by transitory panegyrics written out of necessity.

These two examples of professional Ketman should demonstrate how little discomfort it creates for the rulers. It is the source of considerable dynamic force and one cause of the tremendous impetus toward education. The object is to establish some special field in which one can release one's energies, exploit one's knowledge and sensibility, and at the same time escape the fate of a functionary entirely at the mercy of political fluctuations. The son of a worker who becomes a chemist makes a *permanent* advance. The son of a worker who becomes a member of the security police rises to the surface, where large ships sail but where the sea is changeable and stormy. But most important of all, chemical experiments, bridges, translations of poetry, and medical care are exceptionally free of falsity. The State, in its turn, takes advantage of this Ketman because it needs chemists, engineers, and doctors. From time to time, it is true, there come from above muffled grumbles of hatred against those who practice Ketman in the realm of humanistic studies. Fadeyev, Moscow's literary overseer, attacked the University of Leningrad because one of its students had written a dissertation on the English poet, Walter Savage Landor. "Who needs Landor? Who ever heard of him?" cried Fadeyev. So it would

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seem that moderation and watchfulness are indicated for those who espouse this form of Ketman. 626/155

Sceptical Ketman is widely disseminated throughout intellectual circles. One argues that humanity does not know how to handle its knowledge or how to resolve the problems of production and division of goods. The first scientific attempts to solve social problems, made in the nineteenth century, are interesting but not precise enough. They happened, however, into the hands of the Russians who, unable to think otherwise than dogmatically, raised these first attempts to the dignity of dogma. What is happening in Russia and the countries dependent upon her bespeaks a kind of insanity, but it is not impossible that Russia will manage to impose her insanity upon the whole world and that the return to reason will occur only after two or three hundred years. Finding oneself in the very midst of an historical cyclone, one must behave as prudently as possible, yielding externally to forces capable of destroying all adversaries. This does not prevent one from taking pleasure in one's observations, since what one beholds is indeed unprecedented. Surely man has never before been subjected to such pressure, never has he had to writhe and wriggle so to adapt himself to forms constructed according to the books but obviously not to his size. All his intellectual and emotional capacities are put to the test.

Whoever contemplates this daily sight of repudiation and humiliation knows more about man than an inhabitant of the West who feels no pressure other than that of money. The accumulating of this store of observations is the activity of a miser who counts his treasure in secret. Since this Ketman is based on a total lack of belief in the Method, it helps one conform externally to the obligatory

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626 155 line by allowing for complete cynicism, and therefore for elasticity in adjusting oneself to changing tactics.

626 779 *Metaphysical Ketman*[1] occurs generally in countries with a Catholic past. Most examples of it within the Imperium are found in Poland. This Ketman depends upon a *suspended* belief in a metaphysical principle of the world. A man attached to this Ketman regards the epoch in which he lives as anti-metaphysical, and hence as one in which no metaphysical faith can emerge. Humanity is learning to think in rationalistic and materialistic categories; it is burdened with immediate problems and entangled in a class war. Other-worldly religions are crumbling, living through a period of crisis and, what is worse, serving to defend the obsolete order. This does not mean that mankind will not return to a better and purified religion in the future. Perhaps the New Faith is an indispensable purgatory; perhaps God's purpose is being accomplished through the barbarians, i.e. the Center,[2] who are forcing the masses to awaken out of their lethargy. The spiritual fare these masses receive from the New Faith is inferior and insufficient. Still one must commend the Center for breaking new ground and for demolishing externally splendid but internally rotten façades. One should cooperate in this task without betraying one's attachment to the Mystery. All the more so because the Mystery has no possibility of appearing in literature, for example, and because neither the language nor the ideas at the disposal of contemporary man are ripe enough to express it.

This metaphysical Ketman in its turn has a number of varieties. Certain practicing Catholics serve even in the security police, and *suspend* their Catholicism in executing their inhumane work. Others, trying to maintain a Christian community in the bosom of the New Faith, come out publicly as Catholics. They often succeed in preserving

[1] [For a definition of "Ketman," see cat 16, 80 5760 Analyst]
[2] [Moscow — Analyst]